

Top Secret

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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam

ARMY review(s) completed.

NSA review completed

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15 December 1966

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Information as of 1600
15 December 1966

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HIGHLIGHTS

Hanoi is receiving heavy propaganda support throughout the Communist world of its protests that the US has bombed residential areas of Hanoi. Preliminary field analysis of photography of the raid on 13 December indicates some damage outside the target area at Yen Vien, but it is not yet clear whether this damage occurred in residential areas.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam: No significant enemy contact has been established in any of the 29 large-scale allied ground operations currently in progress (Para. 1). Viet Cong forces on 14 December inflicted moderate casualties on an American platoon guarding the approaches to the US Marine enclave at Chu Lai (Para. 2). The Communists, for military and political organization purposes, have apparently resubordinated South Vietnam's two northernmost provinces--Quang Tri and Thua Thien--to Military Region IV in North Vietnam (Paras. 3-5). [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] the massing of Viet Cong regular forces in Ninh Thuan Province in preparation for future offensive action against primary allied/GVN targets within the province (Para. 6).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam: The constitution being drafted by the Constituent Assembly will provide for a nationally elected president, who will, in turn, choose a prime minister (Paras. 1-2).

III. North Vietnamese Military Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. Communist Political Developments: Hanoi's protests that the US has bombed residential areas in Hanoi is receiving heavy propaganda support throughout the Communist world (Paras. 1-5).

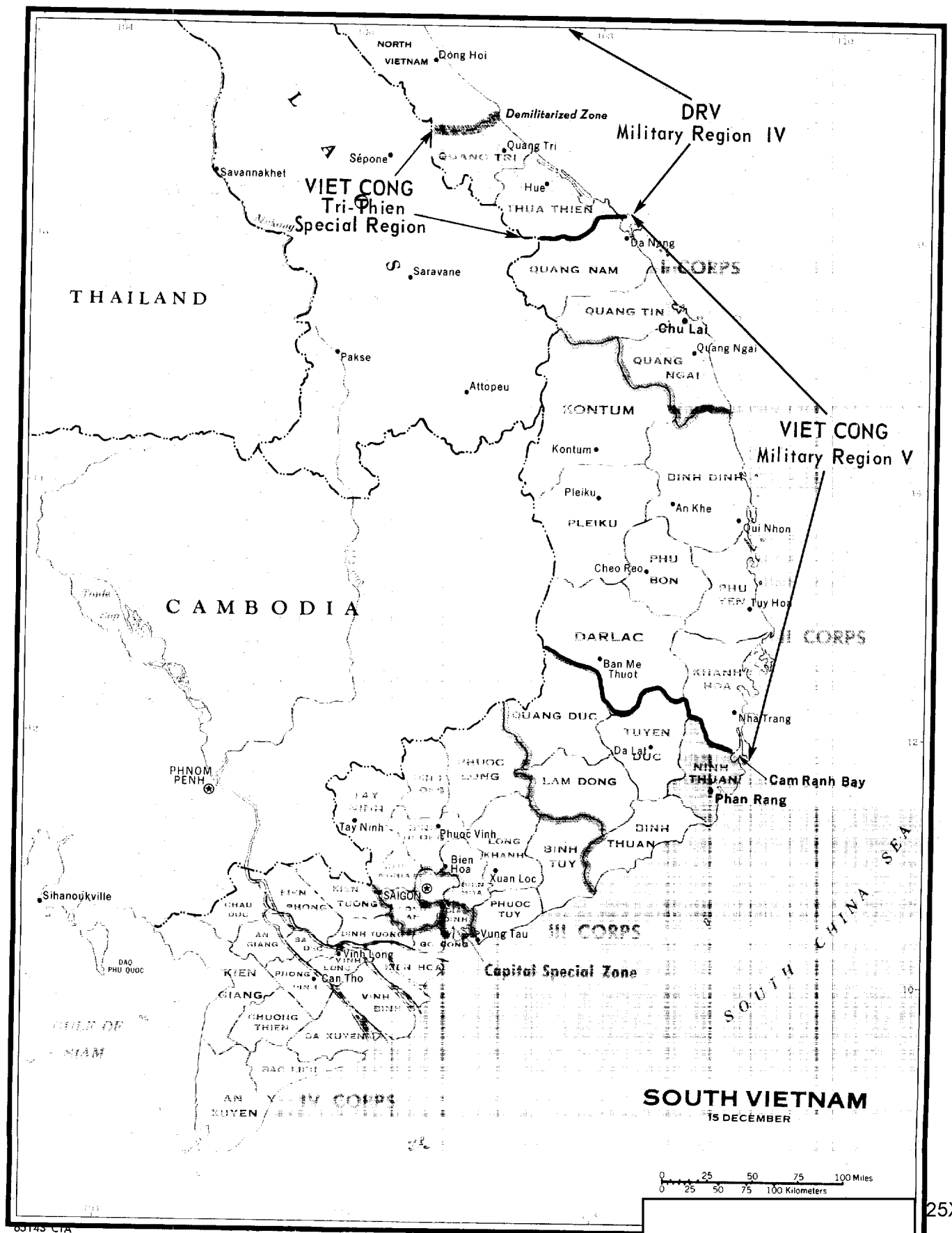
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A three-man delegation of the Italian Communist Party ended its visit to North Vietnam on 12 December (Paras. 8-9).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Allied combat forces continue to press 29 battalion-size or larger search-and-destroy operations against known or suspected Communist troop concentrations and base areas throughout widespread regions of South Vietnam. No significant enemy contact was, however, reported on 15 December.

2. Communist-initiated military activity on 15 December was highlighted by an attack by an estimated platoon-size Viet Cong unit against the defensive perimeter of a US Marine platoon four miles west of Chu Lai near the Quang Tin - Quang Ngai Province border. Eleven marines were killed and 14 wounded before tactical air strikes, artillery, and reinforcements forced the enemy to disengage. Viet Cong losses are unknown.

Southern Provinces Resubordinated to North Vietnam

3. Additional details of the Communists' military and political organization in the northern two provinces of South Vietnam have recently become available through interrogation of several prisoners of war. The statements of these sources support other reports that the Communists have transferred control over Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces from Military Region V in South Vietnam to Military Region IV in North Vietnam. The Communists now call these two provinces the Tri Thien Special Region. The area is also referred to as the "northern subregion" by the Communists.

4. North Vietnamese General Le Trung Chuong is reported to be both the military commander of the Tri Thien Special Region and the secretary of the party committee for this area. General Chuong was previously reported to be the deputy commander of Military Region IV. One prisoner stated that Tri Thien has under its command one North Vietnamese regiment, five independent battalions, and seven specialized support companies.

5. It is now clear from the interrogations whether the larger North Vietnamese units known to be

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operating in the Tri Thien Special Region come under the direct command of General Chuong. There is some evidence that these units (the North Vietnamese 324B and 341st divisions) are under the direct command of the headquarters of Military Region IV. Several of the support units identified by the prisoners of war as subordinate to the Tri Thien Special Region command have, however, the same mission as, and may be identical with, units carried in MACV's order of battle as subordinates of the 324B Division. If they are identical, it is possible that they are administratively under Tri Thien but detached for duty as support elements for the 324B Division.

Viet Cong Military Targets in Ninh Thuan Province

6. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] all "regular force" Viet Cong units in Ninh Thuan Province were recently ordered to a secure area known as "Secret Base 7" for additional training in preparation for coordinated attacks against various allied/GVN targets within the province. The US air base at Phan Rang was reportedly designated as the primary target for attack, with present plans calling for a mortar bombardment rather than a ground penetration assault. Additional enemy objectives reportedly include the government's provincial headquarters at Phan Rang city, a subdistrict headquarters at Tien Le, and the port facility at Cam Ranh Bay. No dates were specified for any of the allegedly impending attacks.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The Constituent Assembly, during its 15 December session, voted in favor of incorporating in the constitution provisions for an executive having both a popularly elected president and an appointed prime minister. According to the press accounts of the meeting, the prime minister would be chosen by the president and would, in turn, pick his own cabinet. Under the proposed system, the legislature would have the power to request that the president dismiss individual members of the cabinet. The president reportedly would be empowered to remove the prime minister, thus creating the basis for a relatively strong chief executive. The prime minister's role would be relegated to the daily administration of the government.

2. In the previous session, the deputies approved a motion that the vacant assembly seat of assassinated member Tran Van Van be filled by Dr. Huynh Kim Huu, who had finished behind Van in the 11 September election on the same slate. Dr. Huu is a southern Catholic. It was also announced at the meeting that Premier Ky will bring the assembly up to date on the general situation in the country during a briefing the deputies hope to have on 19 December.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. Hanoi is receiving heavy propaganda support throughout the Communist world for its protests that the US has bombed residential areas of Hanoi. The Soviets, the North Koreans, and the East Germans have issued government statements, while the Chinese have published a belligerent editorial. The Liberation Front has said the raids called for vengeance on both sides of the parallel. Communist press correspondents in Hanoi are producing a series of stories on the damage to civilian residential areas. TASS and Italian Communist newsmen in Hanoi report that the raids on the 13th destroyed a workers' living quarters on the Red River which housed 500 workers' families and were located some 425 yards from the center of the city. Hanoi claims that the raids on 13 and 14 December killed more than 100 civilians.

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3. A preliminary field analysis of photography of the raid on 13 December indicates some bomb damage outside target areas, but it is not yet clear whether this damage occurred in residential areas. In addition, it would not be unusual for US aircraft to jettison ordnance when threatened by MIGs or surface-to-air missiles--as they were on the 13th--and it is possible that such ordnance fell in populated areas.

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4. A Soviet statement broadcast by Moscow domestic service referred to the bombing incidents as a "grave crime" and warned that the US Government "should not forget" the warning given by the Socialist states at the Bucharest Conference in July. At that time, the Warsaw Pact nations announced readiness to allow volunteers to go to Vietnam when and if Hanoi should request them. Despite its belligerent tone, the Soviet statement contained nothing more than could be expected to follow any alleged American escalation of the war.

5. The belligerent Peking People's Daily editorial on 15 December claimed that US air raids on Hanoi were encouraged by the "revisionist leading group" of the Soviet Union, which was closely collaborating with the US. The article charged that the raids represented an "extremely serious new war escalation," but emphasized Hanoi's ability to resist US pressure. The Chinese editorial contained no new commitment of aid, repeating the familiar theme of "firm support" for Hanoi.

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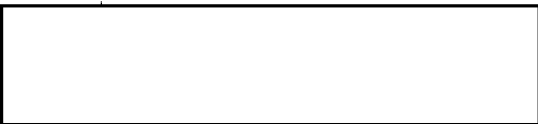
Italian Communist Delegation Leaves Hanoi

8. A week-long visit of a three-man delegation of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) to North Vietnam ended on 12 December with the signing of a joint communiqué. In it, the Italians voiced support for the Vietnamese Communist position on settling the war. During its stay in Hanoi, the delegation held talks with high-ranking Vietnamese officials and apparently received routine treatment afforded visiting free world Communist delegations.

9. Two members of the delegation have reportedly traveled on to North Korea while the third, a correspondent for the PCI newspaper L'Unita, will remain in the DRV for an additional two weeks to report on the war.

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